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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 001871

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RABAT FOR BUSH

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL MEETINGS WITH PM VERHOFSTADT
AND FM DE GUCHT

Classified By: AMBASSADOR SAM FOX, REASONS 1.4.B AND D.

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: IN AN HOUR-LONG MEETING, AMBASSADOR REVIEWED WITH PM VERHOFSTADT KEY ISSUES IN THE U.S.-BELGIAN RELATIONSHIP INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT'S CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVE, TROOPS FOR AFGHANISTAN, AND RECONSTRUCTION AID AND DEBT RELIEF FOR IRAQ. PM REVIEWED PROSPECTS FOR THE FEDERAL ELECTIONS, WHICH WILL HAPPEN ON JUNE 10, AND PRESSED THE AMBASSADOR TO SUPPORT AN INTERNATIONALLY SANCTIONED TRIAL FOR JOSEPH KONY OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY. IN A SHORTER MEETING WITH FM DE GUCHT, AMBASSADOR REVIEWED THE SAME ISSUES, PRESSING DE GUCHT FOR TO MEET SACEUR'S REQUEST FOR MORE TROOPS FOR AFGHANISTAN, AND DISCUSSED PROSPECTS FOR DEALING WITH RUSSIA ON KOSOVO. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) AMBASSADOR FOX, ACCCOMPANIED BY DCM IMBRIE, MET FOR AN HOUR WITH PM VERHOFSTADT ON MAY 6. PM'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR CHRIS HOORNAERT JOINED THE MEETING. AFTER INITIAL GREETINGS AND CONGRATULATIONS ON THE AMBASSADOR'S POSTING, PM REVIEWED THE IMPROVEMENT IN U.S./BELGIAN RELATIONS FROM THE LOW POINT OF 2003. HE NOTED PRESIDENT BUSH'S VISIT TO BELGIUM IN FEBRUARY 2005 AND HIS SPEECH AS THE TURNING POINT. VERHOFSTADT SAID THAT THE NATO/EU FOREIGN MINISTERS TRANSATLANTIC MEETINGS WHICH HE HAD PROPOSED HAVE BECOME AN EFFECTIVE MECHANISM FOR DISCUSSIONS WHICH TRANSCEND NATO AND EU INTERESTS, HIGHLIGHTING SPECIFICALLY DR. RICE'S EFFECTIVE "DE-DRAMATIZATION" OF THE CIA FLIGHTS ISSUE IN THE TRANSATLANTIC MEETING IN 2006.

¶13. (C) AMBASSADOR AND DCM SUBSEQUENTLY MET WITH FM DE GUCHT WHO WAS ACCCOMPANIED BY HIS CHEF DE CABINET, DIRK ACHTEN, HIS DEPUTY CHEF DE CABINET FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS WALTER STEVENS, AND HIS DIRECTOR FOR WESTERN EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS, LUC DE VOLDER. DE GUCHT, JUST BACK FROM A LONG DAY OF CAMPAIGNING IN THIS LATE EVENING MEETING, DISCUSSED ISSUES OF U.S. AND BELGIAN INTERESTS MORE BRIEFLY BEFORE EXCUSING HIMSELF TO RETURN TO THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL.

ELECTIONS

¶14. (SBU) VERHOFSTADT REVIEWED THE JUNE 10 BELGIAN ELECTIONS, TELLING THE AMBASSADOR THAT OTHER THAN FOR THEIR MEETING, HIS TIME WAS ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY DEDICATED TO CAMPAIGNING. HE WAS LESS THAN OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR HIS OPEN VLD PARTY IN THE ELECTIONS AND SAID THAT POLLS INDICATE THAT EACH PARTY FAMILY IS PREDICTED TO RECEIVE ROUGHLY THE SAME NUMBER OF VOTES. IF EACH RECEIVES BETWEEN 40 AND 44 SEATS, VERHOFSTADT THOUGHT A SIX-PARTY COALITION WOULD BE LIKELY, BUT IF ONE PARTY FAMILY RECEIVED SIGNIFICANTLY FEWER SEATS,

THE OTHER FOUR PARTIES WOULD LIKELY JOIN FORCES. HE PREDICTED THAT IT WOULD TAKE A LONG TIME TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT, VERY LIKELY NOT TO BE AGREED UNTIL LATE SUMMER.

CLIMATE CHANGE

15. (SBU) AMBASSADOR RAISED THE PRESIDENT'S CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVE WITH THE PM, EMPHASIZING U.S. LEADERSHIP IN SEEKING A GLOBAL FRAMEWORK TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GASES AND REVIEWING THE LOW LEVEL OF U.S. EMISSIONS DESPITE STRONG ECONOMIC GROWTH AND POPULATION INCREASE. VERHOFSTADT, WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN BRIEFED ON THE INITIATIVE, NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE PUT AN END TO DISCUSSION OF WHETHER CLIMATE CHANGE WAS HAPPENING SO THE WORLD COMMUNITY COULD FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS. HE NOTED BELGIUM'S PLANS TO BUILD 200-300 MEGAWATT WIND GENERATION PARKS. IN RESPONSE TO THE AMBASSADOR'S QUESTIONS ABOUT NUCLEAR ENERGY, VERHOFSTADT SAID THAT HE WOULD (IF HE WERE TO BE IN OFFICE) CLOSE THE OLDEST AND SMALLEST OF BELGIUM'S REACTORS, AND REPLACE THEM BY FOURTH GENERATION REACTORS, WHICH WOULD PRODUCE 200 TIMES LESS RADIOACTIVE WASTE AND 3000 TIMES LESS RADIOACTIVITY THAN CURRENT GENERATION REACTORS.

UN ISSUES

16. (SBU) AMBASSADOR FOX THANKED THE PM FOR BELGIUM'S STAUNCH SUPPORT ON THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS ISSUE AND FOR ITS CHAIRING THE IRAN SANCTIONS COMMITTEE IN THE UNSC. HE NOTED THE CLOSE WORKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELGIUM AND THE U.S. IN THE UNSC AND ASKED THE PM'S VIEWS ON THE KOSOVO RESOLUTION. THE PM SAID HE HAD NO CLEAR IDEA IF RUSSIA WOULD

ABSTAIN OR VETO THE RESOLUTION, HOPING THAT PRESIDENT BUSH'S MEETING WITH PUTIN COULD HELP PUSH THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

DRC

17. (C) IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ON THE DRC, THE PM SAID THAT HE HOPED THAT KABILA COULD OPEN TALKS TO RECONSIDER OLD CONTRACTS WHERE THE DRC'S NATURAL RESOURCES WERE BEING EXPLOITED WITHOUT ANY BENEFIT TO THE GOVERNMENT OR THE CONGOLESE. THE PM RAISED THE ISSUE OF ESTABLISHING AN INFORMAL INTERNATIONAL BODY TO ADVISE KABILA ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES. HOORNAERT NOTED THAT THE MONUC EXTENSION RESOLUTION APPROVED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SUCH A MECHANISM, BUT IT HAD YET TO COME INTO BEING.

KONY AND THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

18. (U) PM VERHOFSTADT TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WANTED TO RAISE AN ISSUE OF GRAVE PERSONAL CONCERN TO HIM, AN ISSUE HE HAS RAISED WITH DR. RICE, PRESIDENT SARKOZY, AND PM BLAIR AMONG OTHERS. JOSEPH KONY, LEADER OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY, WHO HAS DEVASTATED UGANDA AND SUDAN WITH HIS CHILD SOLDIERS, WAS NOW IN THE EASTERN CONGO AND WAS TRYING TO FORM A NEW ARMY IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC. THE PM WANTS TO FIND SOME WAY TO BRING KONY TO TRIAL, NOTING THAT THIS WOULD BE AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE TO OTHER AFRICAN WARLORDS THAT IMPUNITY WOULD NOT BE TOLERATED. HE DID NOT CARE WHETHER IT WAS A NATIONAL, A MULTINATIONAL OR AN INTERNATIONAL COURT. THE POINT WAS TO HAVE A TRIAL. DCM SUGGESTED THAT THE BELGIANS MIGHT WANT TO START WITH THE SOUTH AFRICANS AND TRY TO BUILD SUPPORT IN THE UNSC FOR A UNSC PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT SUPPORTING A TRIAL MECHANISM. (NOTE: THE PM'S INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN SPARKED BY A KAMPALA-BASED BELGIAN JOURNALIST WHO RECENTLY WROTE A BOOK ABOUT KONY AND HIS CRIMES. THE BOOK HAS BECOME A MUCH TALKED ABOUT SUBJECT IN BRUSSELS. END NOTE)

AFGHANISTAN

¶19. (C) AMBASSADOR THANKED THE PM FOR BELGIUM'S MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN ISAF SINCE THE BEGINNING, BUT NOTED SACEUR'S REQUEST FOR BELGIUM TO CONTINUE ITS PRESENCE IN KABUL AND TO PROVIDE OMLT AND CST-A TEAMS AND TO FILL THE VACANT BILLETS IN ISAF HEADQUARTERS. VERHOFSTADT SAID THAT BELGIUM WOULD NOT ONLY STAY AT THE KABUL AIRPORT, BUT WOULD INCREASE ITS PRESENCE THERE BY 40 TROOPS IN OCTOBER AND WOULD TAKE OVER COMMAND OF THE DETACHMENT. THE TRAINING TEAMS, HOWEVER, WERE A "NEW" COMMITMENT. DCM ASKED IF THIS MEANT THAT THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT COULD NOT MAKE THIS DECISION. NOTING SINCE BELGIUM WAS ALREADY COMMITTED TO ISAF, HE ASKED IF THIS COULD THIS NOT BE CONSIDERED A DECISION THAT COULD BE MADE BEFORE THE NEW GOVERNMENT WERE FORMED. THE PM COMMITTED TO REVIEW THIS WITH THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND GET BACK TO THE AMBASSADOR.

IRAQ

¶10. (C) AMBASSADOR THANKED THE PM FOR BELGIUM'S RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE AND OTHER CIVILIAN SUPPORT TO IRAQ AND ASKED IF BELGIUM COULD NOT DO MORE. FOR EXAMPLE, THE AMBASSADOR ASKED WHEN BELGIUM WOULD COMPLETE RELIEF OF IRAQ'S DEBT. THE PM NOTED THAT BELGIUM HAD FORGIVEN 2/3 OF THE DEBT, BUT THAT WHILE THEY HAD COMMITTED TO FORGIVING THE REMAINDER OF THE DEBT, FOR BUDGET REASONS IT WOULD NOT BE DONE UNTIL 2007 OR 2008. THE AMBASSADOR PUSHED BACK, SUGGESTING THAT AS THIS WAS A BOOKKEEPING ISSUE, NOT A CASH FLOW ISSUE, BELGIUM SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMPLETE ITS DEBT FORGIVENESS NOW, AS IT SHOULD NOT IMPACT ON THE BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS. PM SAID HE WOULD EXPLORE THIS WITH THE BUDGET OFFICE AND GET BACK TO THE AMBASSADOR.

RUSSIA AND KOSOVO

¶11. (C) THE FM TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT HE EXPECTED CONTINUING PROBLEMS WITH RUSSIA ON KOSOVO IN THE UNSC. RELATIONS

BETWEEN THE WEST AND RUSSIA WERE COMPLEX. FOR EXAMPLE, RUSSIA WAS COOPERATING ON IRAN, BUT POSTURING OVER MISSILE DEFENSE. BELGIAN PERMREP VERBECKE RECOMMENDED THAT IN COORDINATION WITH US PERMREP KHALIZAD THEY PRESS RUSSIA TO ABSTAIN ON THE KOSOVO RESOLUTION IN JUNE, BUT THE FM SAID HE WAS NOT CONFIDENT OF A BREAKTHROUGH. DE GUCHT SAID THAT IF IT WERE OPPORTUNE, HE WAS READY TO TRAVEL TO RUSSIA TO TALK TO LAVROV, WITH WHOM HE HAS MET FREQUENTLY. IF THE RUSSIANS VETO, THINGS IN KOSOVO WILL BE IN A BAD STATE -- THERE WILL BE NO BASIS FOR THE EU MISSION AND NOT ALL OF THE EU MEMBERS WILL RECOGNIZE A UNLATERAL DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION FROM THE AMBASSADOR, DE GUCHT SAID THAT THERE MAY BE SOME VIOLENCE AND ETHNIC CLEANSING, BUT SERBIA WILL NOT ATTACK AND NATO TROOPS SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTAIN ANY WIDE-SPREAD VIOLENCE.

ELECTIONS

¶12. (SBU) DE GUCHT, A FLEMISH LIBERAL (THE SAME PARTY AS THE PM), SAID THAT THE OUTCOME OF BELGIAN ELECTIONS WAS UNCLEAR. THERE MAY BE MONTHS OF NEGOTIATIONS TO FORM A GOVERNMENT, CERTAINLY ONE WILL NOT BE AGREED UNTIL AUGUST. HIS PARTY'S BEST HOPE WAS FOR THE LIBERALS AND CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS TO FORM A COALITION, LEAVING THE SOCIALISTS IN OPPOSITION. BAD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE WALLOON LIBERAL AND SOCIALIST LEADERS WILL MAKE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO CONTINUE WITH THE CURRENT LIBERAL/SOCIALIST COALITION.

AFGHANISTAN

113. (C) AMBASSADOR RAISED THE ISSUE OF ADDITIONAL TROOPS FOR AFGHANISTAN. THE FM ASSERTED THAT THE CARETAKER GOVERNMENT COULD NOT MAKE THIS DECISION; CONSTITUTIONALLY THIS IS OUT OF BOUNDS UNTIL A NEW GOVERNMENT IS IN PLACE. DE GUCHT NOTED THAT, PERSONALLY, HE SUPPORTED THE US REQUEST, BUT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT MAKE SUCH A COMMITMENT NOW. BELGIUM CONTINUES TO PROVIDE ECONOMIC AND RECONSTRUCTION HELP AND NOTED THAT VERY DAY TWO AGRICULTURAL AGREEMENTS TO SUPPORT AFGHANISTAN HAD BEEN SIGNED. (NOTE: IN IMPLEMENTATION OF BELGIUM'S THREE-YEAR, 30 MILLION DOLLAR ASSISTANCE COMMITMENT. END NOTE)

CLIMATE CHANGE

114. (SBU) AMBASSADOR REVIEWED THE PRESIDENT'S CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVE WITH THE FM IN THE SAME TERMS AS WITH THE PM. THE FM CONSIDERED IT A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT WAS DISAPPOINTED THAT THE US WAS NOT WILLING TO AGREE TO AN EMISSION CAP, NOTING THAT NEW EUROPEAN STATISTICS DEMONSTRATED THAT BELGIUM WAS MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS ITS KYOTO GOALS AND NOTED THE EU'S RECENT GOAL OF 20 PERCNET REDUCTION IN EMISSIONS.

FOX

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